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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Why Florida Republicans don't want drilling off their own coast

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Analysis by [Maxine Joselow](#)
with research by [Vanessa Montalbano](#)

Good morning and welcome to The Climate 202, where we apparently cover “climate psoriasis,” according to Autocorrect.

In today's edition: The **Environmental Protection Agency** moves to block a controversial controversial gold-and-copper mine in Alaska, and California becomes an outlier among **Colorado River Basin** states amid intense water negotiations. But first:

Florida Republicans support drilling – just not off their own coast

Last week, **Rep. Matt Gaetz** (R-Fla.) took to the House floor with an unusual request: He asked his colleagues to block oil drilling off the coast of his home state.

The request was unusual because Gaetz — and most other Republicans on Capitol Hill — have generally supported drilling on federal lands and waters. Indeed, GOP lawmakers have spent the past two years blasting **President Biden** for limiting U.S. fossil fuel production to fight climate change.

But in Florida, politicians of both parties have long opposed drilling off the coasts, saying it could jeopardize military activities in the eastern Gulf of Mexico and harm the state’s tourism industry, which was devastated by the **Deepwater Horizon oil spill**.

Environmentalists have accused Republicans from Florida of hypocrisy, saying they’re using NIMBYism — “not in my backyard” sentiments — to block drilling that they would support someplace else.

“When it comes to getting real about the climate crisis and moving beyond NIMBYism, what we really need to be looking at is ways to phase out drilling in all U.S. waters,” said **Hunter Miller**, the senior field representative for Florida at **Oceana**, a conservation group.

However, Gaetz and other GOP lawmakers from Florida insist their positions are not in conflict. They note the state is home to the 120,000-square-mile Gulf Test Range, which the military uses for munitions testing and training activities.

“The Gulf of Mexico test range is the only place in the world where we do live-fire, over-sea munitions testing,” Gaetz said in an interview Monday.

“It is a terrible idea to shoot experimental missiles over oil rigs,” he added.

(Don’t) drill, baby, drill

Gaetz was speaking on the floor last week during the debate over the **Strategic Production Response Act**, a GOP bill that would bar Biden from releasing oil from the **Strategic Petroleum Reserve** unless he opens up more federal lands to oil and gas leasing.

- Gaetz offered an amendment to the bill, which the House adopted, aimed at maintaining a 10-year moratorium on oil and gas leasing off the coasts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.
- **President Donald Trump** announced the moratorium in 2020 during a campaign appearance in Jupiter, Fla., reversing an earlier pledge to open those waters to oil exploration.

Meanwhile, **Rep. Mike Waltz** (R-Fla.) last week reintroduced the **Florida Shores Protection and Fairness Act**, which would similarly enshrine the Trump-era drilling moratorium in law.

- The measure is backed by Gaetz and fellow Florida Republican **Reps. John Rutherford, Neal Dunn, Maria Elvira Salazar, Carlos A. Gimenez, Brian Mast, Bill Posey** and **Mario Diaz-Balart**.

- On the other side of the Capitol, Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, both Florida Republicans, have co-sponsored the measure in that chamber.

'The people ... don't want it'

Scott is no stranger to this issue: When he was governor of Florida, he helped persuade **Ryan Zinke**, the interior secretary, to reverse the Trump administration's earlier pledge to open more of America's coast to drilling to foster "energy independence."

In an interview Monday, Scott noted that offshore drilling is deeply unpopular among his constituents, with more than 60 percent of Florida voters supporting a constitutional amendment that banned the practice in 2018.

"The people in Florida don't want it," Scott said. "We've got to protect the coastline. We're a big tourism state, and the oil spill in 2010 was devastating to our state's economy."

When asked why he backs drilling elsewhere, Scott replied, "People can decide that for their states."

Miller of Oceana said he welcomed such sentiments — to a certain extent.

"We of course applaud efforts to protect our oceans from offshore drilling," he said. "But we would caution our Florida delegation to support other communities that have really well-documented opposition to drilling, as well."

Agency alert

EPA may have dealt 'final nail in the coffin' to Alaska's Pebble Mine

The **Environmental Protection Agency** on Tuesday announced that it has used the **Clean Water Act** to block a controversial gold-and-copper mine in Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed, one of the world's largest salmon spawning grounds, [Timothy Puko reports](#) for The Washington Post.

The agency said it vetoed the project, known as the **Pebble Mine**, because it determined that mining discharge would cause unacceptable damage to the region's fisheries. Environmentalists, congressional Democrats and Alaska Native groups cheered the decision and declared the project to be history.

"This is the final nail in the coffin for the Pebble Mine," said **Sen. Maria Cantwell** (D-Wash.), adding that the mine "would have devastated Bristol Bay salmon" and the thousands of families that depend on that fishery.

Pebble Limited Partnership, the U.S. subsidiary of the Canadian company behind the Pebble Mine, slammed the move and signaled a future legal challenge.